

# Hampton Roads Disability Board SOAR Orientation

Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration  
(SAMHSA) SOAR Technical Assistance Center  
Policy Research Associates, Inc.

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**SAMHSA**  
Substance Abuse and Mental Health  
Services Administration

# Disclaimer

*The views, opinions, and content expressed in this presentation do not necessarily reflect the views, opinions, or policies of the Center for Mental Health Services (CMHS), the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), or the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS).*

# Purpose and Objectives

- Share the importance of Supplemental Security Income (SSI) and Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI) benefits
  - Including income, health insurance, education and employment supports, and housing stability
- Offer opportunities for community members to get involved with SOAR
  - Connecting to local SOAR efforts, the SOAR Online Course, and the SOAR Online Application Tracking (OAT) program

# What is SOAR?



- A model for assisting eligible individuals to apply for Social Security Administration (SSA) disability benefits
- For individuals who are experiencing or at risk of homelessness and have a serious mental illness, co-occurring substance use disorder, or other physical disabilities
- Sponsored by SAMHSA in collaboration with the Social Security Administration (SSA) since 2005
- All 50 states and Washington, DC currently participate

# SSI and SSDI: The Basics

## Supplemental Security Income (SSI)

- Eligibility based on need: low income and resources; living arrangement
- Monthly amount based on Federal Benefit Rate: \$794/month (2021)\*
- Date of eligibility based on Protective Filing Date/Application Date
- Health insurance: Medicaid

## Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI)

- Eligibility based on insured status (FICA payments)
- Monthly amount based on earnings history
- Date of eligibility based on “date of onset” of disability, 5 month waiting period
- Health insurance: Medicare

# SSI/SSDI Eligibility: Definition of Disability for Adults

## SSA's Definition of Disability



Medical  
Condition(s)

- Diagnosis
- Documentation
- Duration



Functional  
Impairment(s)

- Severity
- Work
- SGA

# SOAR Eligibility: Decision Tree

## SOAR Eligibility: Decision Tree

SSI/SSDI Outreach, Access, and Recovery (SOAR) is funded by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) and is a national program designed to increase access to the disability income benefit programs administered by the Social Security Administration (SSA) for eligible adults and children who are experiencing or at risk of homelessness and have a serious mental illness, medical impairment, and/or a co-occurring substance use disorder.

### Should I complete a SOAR-assisted SSI/SSDI application?

#### Does the individual (child, youth, or adult) have a disabling condition?

One or more serious mental illness(es), medical condition(s), and/or a co-occurring substance use disorder that meets or equals the [SSA Listings of Impairments](#).

Y

#### Is the individual experiencing or at risk of homelessness?

The SAMHSA SOAR initiative is intended for individuals experiencing or at risk of homelessness. These terms are defined differently by SOAR and the Social Security Administration (SSA). The SOAR model follows the [definitions of "homeless" and "at risk of homelessness"](#) used by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development.

Y

Use the SOAR model and all five SOAR Critical Components for assisting with SSI/SSDI applications.

Flag the application as SOAR with SSA and Disability Determination Services (DDS).

Track the outcome of the application in the [SOAR Online Application Tracking \(OAT\)](#) program!

N

Explore employment support options and other local resources for economic support.

N

The individual is stably housed and is not receiving a voucher or rental assistance.

Use the Critical Components as outlined in the SOAR model to assist with a quality SSI/SSDI application. Do not flag as a SOAR application with SSA and DDS. Do not track the outcomes in the SOAR OAT program.



## SOAR Critical Components

Using these five SOAR Critical Components, case workers play a central role in gathering complete, targeted, and relevant information for SSA and DDS, resulting in high-quality SSI/SSDI applications. These components significantly increase the likelihood of an approval for those who are eligible.

1. Serving as the Applicant's Representative
2. Collecting and Submitting Medical Records
3. Writing and Submitting a Medical Summary Report (MSR)
4. Obtaining a Co-signature on the MSR by an Acceptable Medical Source
5. Completing a Quality Review of Applications Prior to Submission

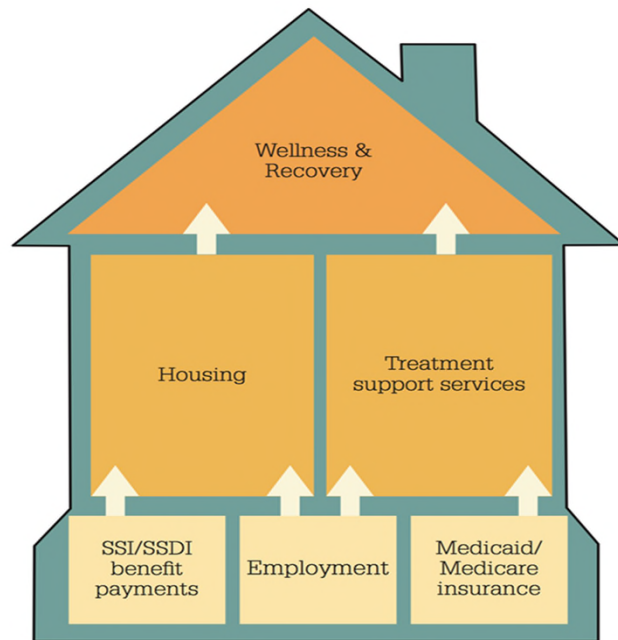
For more information: [soar@prainc.com](mailto:soar@prainc.com) | (518) 439-7415 | [soarworks.prainc.com](http://soarworks.prainc.com)

# A Foundation for Recovery and Resiliency

## More Than Income

- Access to health care and housing
- Increased education and employment opportunities
- Decrease in incarcerations and hospitalizations

## SSI/SSDI: One Brick in Foundation





# How do States and Communities Benefit?

SSI and Medicaid bring federal dollars into states, localities, and community programs:

- Health providers can recoup cost of uncompensated care.
- States and localities can recoup the cost of public assistance.
- Cash benefits and back payments received by individuals is spent in the local community (2020: \$518 million\*).

\* <https://soarworks.samhsa.gov/article/soar-outcomes-and-impact>

# What Makes SOAR Unique?



SOAR-trained case workers are the heroes!



# SOAR Works!

## Cumulative Outcomes

CUMULATIVE INITIAL  
APPROVAL RATE / 65%

47,751

Cumulative  
initial approvals

7,459

Cumulative  
appeal approvals

55,210

people receiving benefits  
because of SOAR

\*National SOAR outcomes as of June 30, 2020

<https://soarworks.samhsa.gov/article/soar-outcomes-and-impact>

# 2020 National Outcomes

Application Type	Approval Rate	Number of Approvals	Average Days to Decision
Initial	65%*	4,265	115
Appeals	50%	868	211

Financial Outcomes		
Average General Assistance Reimbursement	Average Medicaid Reimbursement	Average Retroactive Back Payment
\$3,144	\$10,529	\$6,821

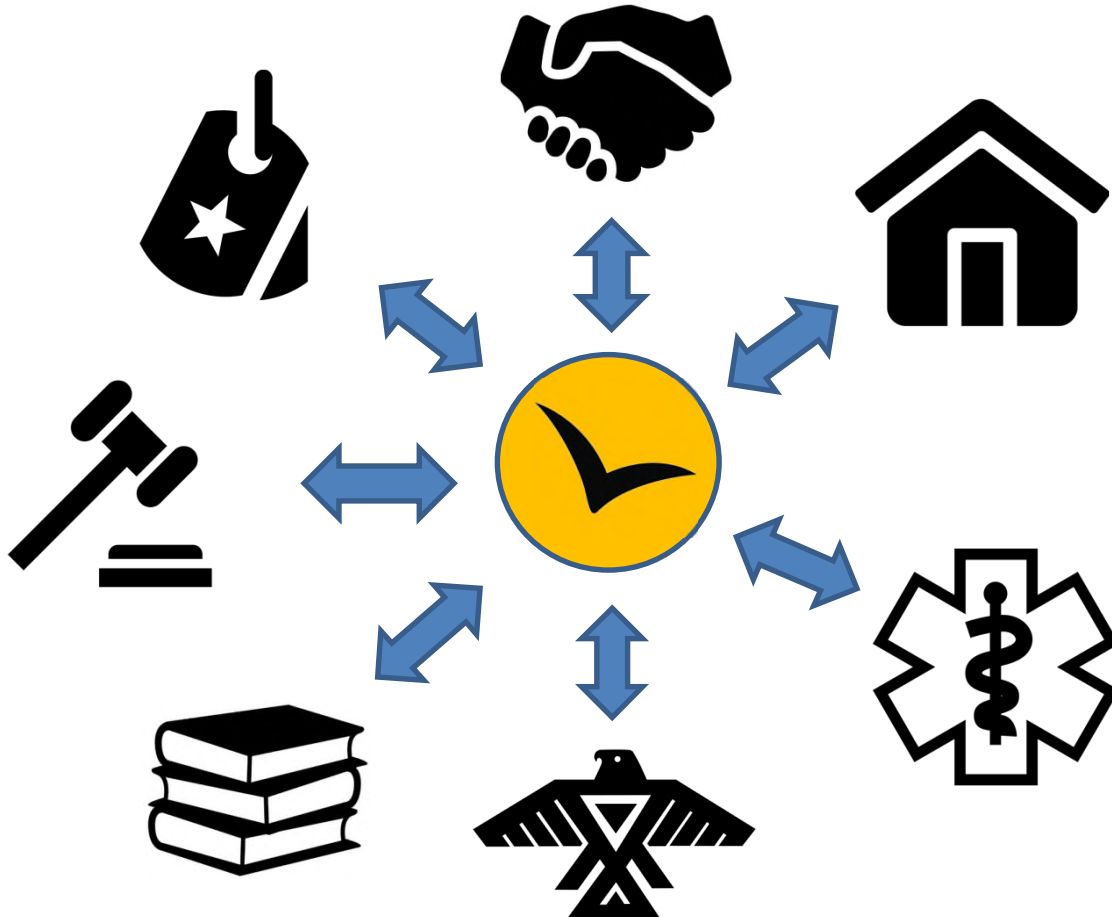
# SOAR Super Stars!



	State	2021 Decisions	2021 Approvals	2021 Allowance	2021 Average Days	2021 Cumulative Decisions	2021 Cumulative Approvals	2021 Cumulative Allowance Rate
1	Pennsylvania	347	295	85%	100	4021	3637	90%
2	Tennessee	176	155	88%	111	2655	2389	90%
3	Maryland	175	151	86%	93	1706	1467	86%
4	Arkansas	30	27	90%	80	1238	1032	83%
5	North Carolina	186	114	61%	427	3112	2358	76%
6	Oklahoma	209	147	70%	89	2175	1593	73%
7	<b>Virginia</b>	<b>155</b>	<b>109</b>	<b>70%</b>	<b>120</b>	<b>2147</b>	<b>1544</b>	<b>72%</b>
8	D.C.	24	20	83%	195	632	436	69%
9	Oregon	218	151	69%	114	3166	2173	69%
10	Kansas	121	90	74%	160	1658	1125	68%
	TOTALS	1641	1259	77%	145	22510	17754	79%

\*Inclusion: Highest cumulative approval rates on initial application for states with at least 325 cumulative decisions, at least 24 decisions in 2021 (2 per month), and a 2020 approval rate above the national average. **Combined, these states had 26,323 decisions**

# Community Collaborations



# SOAR Leadership Structure

## SOAR TA Center



- Facilitates strategic planning meetings
- Conducts Leadership Academies, webinars, & learning communities
- Develops resources, including SOARWorks, the SOAR Online Course, and OAT
- Provides TA at all stages of SOAR implementation

## State Team Lead



- Facilitates state steering committee
- Directs plans to grow & sustain statewide activities
- Serves as liaison to localities
- Maintains relationships with SSA & DDS
- Submits SOAR outcomes to the TA Center

## Local Lead



- Facilitates local steering committee
- Directs local implementation plans
- Facilitates SOAR Online Course cohorts
- Conducts SOAR Online Course Review Sessions
- Ensures quality applications & reports outcomes

## Case Manager



- Completes high-quality SSI & SSDI applications using the SOAR model
- Communicates with local SSA & DDS representatives
- Tracks application outcomes

\*OAT: Online Application Tracking Program

\*DDS: Disability Determination Services

\*TA: Technical Assistance



# Oh, the support you will receive!

## SOAR TA Center Activities and Support



SOAR Online Course



SOAR Leadership Academy



SOAR Online Application Tracking (OAT) Program



SOARWorks Library



Individual Technical Assistance



SOARing Over Lunch



SOAR eNews



Bi-Monthly Webinars



# Benefits of the SOAR Online Course



## **SSI/SSDI Outreach, Access, and Recovery (SOAR) Online Course: Adult Curriculum**

- Standardized training provided across all geographic areas
- SOAR Leaders can coordinate follow-up training and support
- Course is FREE, web-based, and self-guided
- 20 CEUs from National Association of Social Workers (NASW)

# SOAR Online Course: Articles and Practice Case

## Articles and Content

**SOAR WORKS** SAMHSA  
SSI/SSDI Outreach, Access, and Recovery

Contact Us Me Log Out

SOAR in Your State Online Courses OAT & Outcomes Library & Tools Ask a Question

Current course: SSI/SSDI Outreach, Access, and Recovery (SOAR) Online Course: Adult Curriculum

### What is SOAR?

SSI/SSDI Outreach, Access, and Recovery (SOAR) is a program designed to increase access to Social Security Administration (SSA) disability benefits for eligible individuals who are experiencing or at risk of homelessness and have a mental illness, medical impairment, and/or a co-occurring substance use disorder.

Many people with disabilities who experience homelessness or are at risk of homelessness (e.g., those returning to the community from institutions such as jails, prisons, or hospitals) struggle to access the resources they need. Many suffer from disabling mental illnesses, co-occurring substance use, trauma, and medical issues that impact their ability to work. The path to recovery can be extraordinarily challenging when one is constantly struggling to meet basic needs. Having income and health care benefits is often a critical first step on the road to recovery.

**The Social Security Administration (SSA) has two programs that can provide assistance.**

- Supplemental Security Income (SSI), a needs-based program, for individuals who are blind, disabled, or elderly, with low income/resources
- Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI) for blind or disabled individuals who are insured through employee and employer contributions to the Social Security Trust Fund.
- In most states, Medicaid and/or Medicare health insurance accompany these benefits for those eligible

**Circumstances can impede access to income and health care benefits.**

- SSA communicates mainly by mail, which is a challenge when one does not have a permanent, reliable address.
- People who are experiencing homelessness often have sporadic medical care, making it difficult to access medical records to document disability.
- Symptoms can interfere with cognitive functioning, making it difficult to navigate a complex system.
- SOAR helps to overcome these barriers!

**SOAR - SSI/SSDI Outreach, Access, and Recovery**  
SOAR is a Best Practice supported by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA)

- Designed to help states increase access to SSI/SSDI for eligible adults who are experiencing or at risk of homelessness and have a co-occurring

### CLASSES IN THIS COURSE

- 1. The Need for SOAR**
  - Class Home
  - 1. What is SOAR?
  - 2. Overview of Social Security Disability Programs: SSI and SSDI
  - 3. SSA: What is Disability?
  - 4. Access to SSA Disability Programs: Players, Roles & Tasks
  - 5. Steps in the SSA Disability Application Process
  - 6. Disability Determination: The SSA Sequential Evaluation
  - 7. The SOAR Model: Critical Components
  - 8. The SOAR Process: Critical Components in Action
  - 9. Definitions of Homelessness
  - 10. Identifying SOAR Applicants
  - 11. SOAR Values
  - 12. Try It! Key Concepts of Class 1
  - 13. Conclusion
  - Meet Your Client - Practice Case
2. Initiating the Application
3. Exploring Basic Eligibility
4. Medical Information
5. The Link to Functioning
6. Completing the Application Packet
7. Supporting Resiliency and Recovery

## Practice Case

**SOAR WORKS** SAMHSA  
SSI/SSDI Outreach, Access, and Recovery

Contact Us Me Log Out

SOAR in Your State Online Courses OAT & Outcomes Library & Tools Ask a Question

Current course: SSI/SSDI Outreach, Access, and Recovery (SOAR) Online Course: Adult Curriculum

### Practice Case: Meet Your Client

Welcome to the SOAR Online Course Practice Case!

*Practice Case pages appear at the end of each class, designated by a briefcase icon. Detailed instructions are provided under "Tasks for This Class."*

Your name is "Kristin Smith" from XYZ Community Mental Health Center and you are assisting "Michael Byrnes" to apply for SSI/SSDI. You will learn more about Michael on each *Practice Case page* via interview videos, progress notes, and medical records.

*Let's meet Michael...*

#### Tasks for this Class:

- SAVE ALL OF THE DOCUMENTS provided in the PRACTICE CASE MATERIALS BOX**
  - Right-click on each file, choose "Save Target As" or "Save Link As," and save in an easily-accessible location on YOUR computer. (Having difficulty? Here are some troubleshooting tips.)
  - Review the four "Guides"/"Tips" - these will help you proceed successfully through the Course/Practice Case.
  - The five *SSA forms* and a *Medical Summary Report* will be uploaded later in the Course once you have learned more about your applicant and are able to complete them.
- VIEW THE APPLICANT INTERVIEW VIDEO**
  - Take notes on what you observe about the applicant.
  - You can come back to this page at any time to view the video again.

**Practice Case Materials:**

- Practice Case Task Guide.pdf
- SSA Forms Guide.pdf
- Practice Case MSR Tips.pdf
- MSR Interview Guide and Template.docx
- SSA-1696 Appointment of Representative.pdf

**SOAR Case Study - Male Part 1**

Watch later Share

# Getting Involved: Time Commitment

- Training: 20 hours
- 20-40 hours per complete application
- SOAR Critical Components
- Outcome Tracking
- Benefit to Your Agency and the Individuals You Serve



## Getting Involved with SOAR

*You want to be a SOAR provider? That's great! Here's what to expect.*

SOAR promotes recovery and wellness through increased access to Social Security disability benefits for eligible individuals who are experiencing or at risk of homelessness and have a serious mental illness, medical impairment, and/or a co-occurring substance use disorder. SOAR providers assist individuals with complete and quality applications. This is not an easy task, and we want to be sure that you understand the commitment required – we believe it is well worth the effort!

### Training

The SOAR Online Course trains providers to assist individuals with the Social Security disability application process. The course includes an Adult Curriculum for assisting with Supplemental Security Income (SSI) and Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI) claims for adults and a Child Curriculum for assisting with SSI claims for children.

- The SOAR Online Course: Adult and Child Curriculums are free and are located on the SOARWorks website (<https://soarworks.praire.com/content/soar-online-course-catalog>).
- Each curriculum consists of seven classes, each of which has a series of articles, short quizzes, and a practice case component. The practice case provides an opportunity for trainees to apply what they have learned in the course by completing a sample application packet for a fictitious applicant using SOAR techniques.
- It takes approximately 20 hours to complete each curriculum and participants can work at their own pace, starting and stopping as they wish. However, we encourage students to complete the curriculum within 30 days to retain the information learned.
- Upon successful completion, participants will receive 20 CEUs (continuing education units) from the National Association of Social Workers (NASW).

Many SOAR Local Leads offer one-day SOAR Online Course Review Sessions to review key components of the curriculum, discuss local/state practices, and connect new providers to local Social Security Administration (SSA) and DDS (Disability Determination Services) offices.

### Time Commitment

We estimate that each SOAR application will take approximately 20-40 hours to complete, from initial engagement to receiving a decision on a claim. This generally occurs over the course of 60-90 days.

- The time spent on each application will vary depending on the amount of engagement that is needed as well as other variables such as the experience level of the SOAR worker. For example, engagement with an applicant who is residing in an institution may take 20 hours, while it may take longer to connect with someone who is living outside or difficult to contact.

### SOAR Critical Components

SOAR providers with higher approval rates credit their success to implementing the SOAR critical components<sup>1</sup> and submitting high quality applications. Use of these components significantly increases the

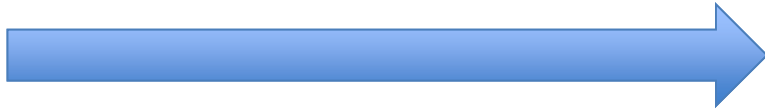
# Virginia SOAR Certification Process

- Complete the SOAR Online Course
- Attend Virginia Specific Certification Training
  - After completing the online training, potential SOAR workers must attend a one day, in person (or virtual) course review and certification session. Upon completion of this certification training an individual receives Certified SOAR Worker designation.
- Regularly engage with your area's SOAR Local Lead and State Team Lead
- Report all SOAR outcomes in OAT

# Online Application Tracking (OAT)



All the reasons  
OAT is awesome!

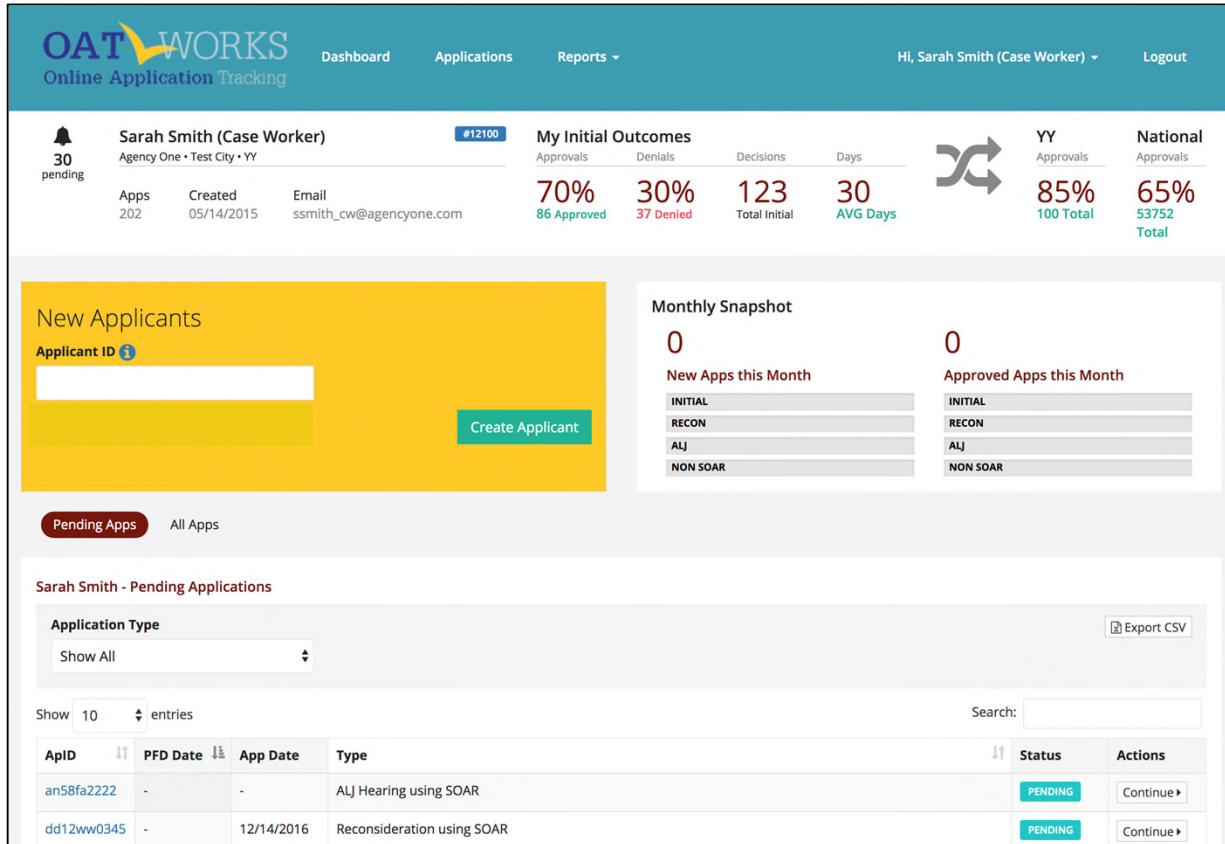


- Web based
- User friendly
- HIPAA compliant
- Monitors quality
- Takes only 3-5 minutes
- It's FREE!

<https://soartrack.samhsa.gov>



# OAT Case Worker Dashboard



# Next Steps

- Learn more about SOAR
- Discuss how SOAR can make an impact within your agency/community
- Get in touch with your SAMHSA SOAR TA Center Liaison, SOAR Local Leads, and SOAR State Team Lead
- Register for the SOAR Online Course

# Questions to Consider

- When someone engaged with your agency needs to apply for Social Security Disability Benefits, what do you do with them?
  - Help them apply?
  - Refer?
  - Encourage them to apply on their own?
- Overall, how is that going? Do you have a 72% approval rate on initial application in approximately 120 days?



# Additional Resources

- SOAR Works Website and Online Course: <https://soarworks.samhsa.gov/>
- SOAR Outcomes Tracking: <https://soartrack.samhsa.gov/>
- SSA Disability Information: <https://www.ssa.gov/benefits/disability/>
- SSA Employment Supports: <https://choosework.ssa.gov/>

# Thank You

SAMHSA's mission is to reduce the impact of substance abuse and mental illness on America's communities.

<https://soarworks.samhsa.gov>

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[www.samhsa.gov](http://www.samhsa.gov)

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